

# THE VAUGHAN WILLIAMS TUBA CONCERTO: ITS INCEPTION, AND INFLUENCE ON SELECTED TWENTIETH CENTURY WORKS FOR THE TUBA BY BRITISH COMPOSERS

By

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## Abstract

The Concerto for Bass Tuba by Ralph Vaughan Williams was the first concerto written for solo tuba, and remains a staple in the repertoire today. The Vaughan Williams Concerto came about in the twentieth century due to the rapidly evolving role of the tuba within the orchestra, brass and military bands, eventually inspiring Vaughan Williams to write for the tuba as a solo instrument.

The Vaughan Williams Concerto influenced Edward Gregson's Tuba Concerto, as it is directly quoted in the development section of Gregson's first movement. There are also marked similarities between the two concerti in terms of form, range, and intervallic material.

The Vaughan Williams and Gregson Concertos both influenced two works for the tuba by British composers that would come about in the subsequent decades: the Concerto for Tuba and Strings by Roger Steptoe, and *Capriccio* by Rodney Newton. Steptoe's Concerto is mostly atonal, yet the influence of Vaughan Williams and Gregson on its form, style, and intervallic relationships is still discernable. Newton borrows fanfare-like elements from Gregson while utilizing motivic material that is similar to Vaughan Williams. The goal of this paper is to show the influence of the Concerto for Bass Tuba by Vaughan Williams on the British tuba concerto as it evolved throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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# Introduction

Since its inception in 1835, the tuba has had a clearly defined and sometimes narrow role within the orchestra, wind band, and other ensembles where it is commonly used. The role of the tuba as envisioned by its earliest composers was strictly to provide bass lines and foundational harmonies within the ensemble. The very notion of a tuba playing a solo, let alone a full concerto, might have seemed inconceivable in the early years. Within the last century the tuba has undergone a remarkable reevaluation by performers, composers, and pedagogues, meaning that today the idea of the tuba playing solos and melodic lines within a large ensemble, as well as chamber music and concerti as a soloist, is no longer a foreign concept. This twentieth century reinvention of the tuba's role and the discovery of its greater potential is due in large part to a handful of innovative composers, performers, and teachers who had a much greater vision of the tuba's capabilities. Legendary tubists such as William Bell, Harvey Phillips, Arnold Jacobs, R. Winston Morris, Roger Bobo, and John Fletcher all made significant contributions to the tuba's evolution and its emerging roles, but there is little doubt that it would have failed to progress to where it is today if not for the great composers who pioneered writing for the tuba. While American and British composers alike have made significant contributions to the tuba solo literature, this document will focus on British tuba literature starting with the seminal work for tuba, the Concerto for Bass Tuba by Ralph Vaughan Williams and will seek to draw parallels between this work and two subsequent tuba concertos: Tuba Concerto by Edward Gregson and Concerto for Tuba and

Strings by Roger Steptoe, by examining similarities and contrasts in form, tempo, harmony, and motivic material from the three works. The document will then discuss Vaughan Williams's possible influence on a twenty-first century work: *Capriccio for Tuba* by Rodney Newton.

## The Vaughan Williams Concerto

Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) wrote the first concerto for the solo tuba. Vaughan Williams was born in Down Ampney, Gloucestershire, England, and hailed from a family of prominent intellectuals, which included Josiah Wedgwood (1730-1795) and Charles Darwin (1809-1882). After his somewhat obscure early years as an unknown composer, Vaughan Williams's career finally took off in the 1910's, and he went on to become perhaps the most influential British composer of the early twentieth century. Aside from the tuba concerto, which was one of his final compositions, Vaughan Williams was a composer of symphonies, band music, choral music, and operas, as well as an arranger of folk songs. According to Joseph Machlis, "The English renaissance was heralded by an awakening of interest in native song and dance. The most important figure among them was Ralph Vaughan Williams, who succeeded Elgar as the representative of English music on the international scene."<sup>1</sup> The tuba concerto came about as a result of Vaughan Williams being commissioned to write a new work for a concert celebrating the Golden Jubilee of

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Machlis, *Introduction to Contemporary Music* (New York: WW Norton and Company, 1979) 291.

the London Symphony Orchestra.<sup>2</sup> The premiere of the Vaughan Williams Concerto for Bass Tuba was given by the London Symphony on June 13, 1954, with the orchestra's principal tubist, Philip Catelinet, performing as the soloist, and Sir John Barbirolli conducting. Gary Bird writes, "Besides notable concertos for violin and for piano, Ralph Vaughan Williams has enriched the literature of the concerto for lesser-known instruments – the harmonica and the bass tuba – raising them, too, to concert rank."<sup>3</sup> While it was not the first work ever written for the solo tuba, the Vaughan Williams concerto was the first full concerto written for the instrument. The fact that this concerto was written by an already very prolific — as opposed to unknown — composer did much for its fame, as well as enhancing the visibility and viability of the tuba as a solo instrument. According to Clifford Bevan, "John Fletcher points out that V[aughan]W[illiams] had intended for some time to write a tuba concerto, and it has to be said that very often sections of the tuba parts in his orchestral works approach a concerto level of difficulty."<sup>4</sup> Vaughan Williams's reasoning for writing a concerto for the tuba is not entirely clear, but it is worth noting that the aging composer had written his *Romance in D-flat for Harmonica* only a few years before in 1951. Perhaps Vaughan Williams was intentionally experimenting with writing for unusual solo instruments in the latter part of his life, but it is apparent from John Fletcher's account that the composer had for years prior sought to treat the tuba not as a novelty, but as a serious instrument for serious

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<sup>2</sup> Clifford Bevan, *The Tuba Family* (Hampshire: Faber and Faber Unlimited, 1978) 437.

<sup>3</sup> Gary Bird, *Program Notes for the Solo Tuba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) 107.

<sup>4</sup>Bevan, 437.



musicians. The Vaughan Williams concerto shows off the tuba's virtuosic and lyrical capabilities, and the music is in no way plodding or humorous. Not surprisingly, musical pundits and critics were skeptical. Philip Catelinet, in his article for the *International Tuba-Euphonium Association Journal* entitled "The Truth About the Vaughan Williams Tuba Concerto," mentions one caustic article: "Vaughan Williams, now 81, has composed a concerto for bass tuba. His last concert was for mouth organ, and it ran Larry Adler to the last ounce of his technique. Philip Catelinet, first tuba player of the L.S.O has manfully taken on the solo part. He will need all his breath."<sup>5</sup> Catelinet had his doubts as well, but his playing in the initial rehearsals was encouraging to Vaughan Williams, and although Catelinet had a few misgivings about his inaugural performance, particularly of the first and third movements, the immediate public reception was mostly positive, despite the reactions of a few critics.<sup>6</sup>

The original orchestral version of the Vaughan Williams is scored for solo tuba, two flutes, oboe, two clarinets, bassoon, two horns, two trumpets, two trombones, percussion, and strings. A transcription of the orchestral part for piano accompaniment is also commonly heard in recital settings. The concerto is in three movements, and follows the standard tempo scheme of fast-slow-fast. The first movement is entitled "Prelude" and marked "Allegro moderato" with a suggested

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<sup>5</sup> Philip Catelinet, "The Truth About the Vaughan Williams Tuba Concerto," *ITEA Journal* 14, no. 2 (1986) <http://philipcatelinet.com/biography/the-truth-about-the-vaughan-williams-tuba-concerto-by-philip-catelinet-itea-journal-volume-14-number-2-november-1986> (accessed December 11, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Catelinet, (1986).

tempo of quarter note equals 96 beats per minute, though many performers have taken some liberty with this, as may be heard on several recordings. For example, Harvey Phillips played the first movement at quarter note equals 106 in his recording; Don Little took it slightly slower than the composer suggested at around quarter note equals 90-92, and Arnold Jacobs played it significantly faster at quarter note equals 116.<sup>7</sup> The second movement, entitled “Romanza,” is marked “Andante sostenuto” and quarter note equals 60, although liberties have been taken with this movement as well, as it is often played several clicks slower. The preferred slower tempi of most performers almost gives this movement the feeling of an eighth-note beat. For example, Harvey Phillips’s recording of the second movement at quarter note equals 45 is an extreme example, but the mean tempo for most recordings seems to be around 54.<sup>8</sup> The third movement is entitled “Finale - Rondo Alla Tedesca,” and is waltz-like in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time. The tempo is marked “Allegro” and quarter note equals 150, or dotted half note equals 50, since the music, especially in the “Poco animato” section beginning four measures before rehearsal number 5, is intended to be felt in one rather than three. Catelinet personally felt that this tempo was too fast, and that the premiere performance would have been better had the conductor not insisted on taking it at that tempo.<sup>9</sup>

From a theoretical standpoint, parallels can be drawn between the tuba concerto and some of Vaughan Williams’s previous works, at least on a superficial

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<sup>7</sup> Michael A Fischer, “Ralph Vaughan Williams: An interpretive analysis of Concerto for Bass Tuba,” University of North Texas (1999) 7.

<sup>8</sup> Fischer, (1999) 7.

<sup>9</sup> Catelinet, (1986).

level. An example of this is the motivic material in the opening of the first movement, the way the melodic line resembles the recurring motive in his 1921 work, *The Lark Ascending*. It is certainly not unusual for composers subconsciously to recycle their own material, but perhaps this was a deliberate attempt on Vaughan Williams's part to prove that the tuba could be every bit as graceful as the violin. Clifford Bevan also draws a parallel between the opening melodic line in the second movement to the tenor tuba solo in "Bydlo" from Maurice Ravel's orchestration of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*.<sup>10</sup> Vaughan Williams studied composition in Paris with Ravel, famed orchestrator of the piano work, for a few months in 1909, but most of his music seemed to show few signs of Ravel's influence. Bevan poses an important question, "Note what occurs at the peak of each phrase. While working on the unfamiliar task of devising a soaring melody for solo tuba, did Vaughan Williams subconsciously tread the path previously traveled by his mentor?"<sup>11</sup> From this, it could be inferred that perhaps Maurice Ravel with his arrangement of *Pictures at an Exhibition* inspired Vaughan Williams to write for the tuba.

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<sup>10</sup> Clifford Bevan, "Vaughan Williams's Tuba Concerto: Composition and First Performance," *ITEA Journal* 35, no. 2 (2008) 62.

<sup>11</sup>Bevan, (2008) 62.



Vaughan Williams, Walton, Britten, and others.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Philip Catelinet had himself been a euphonium player with the Salvation Army brass band. The British style brass band and its influence on British composers perhaps explains why the first tuba concerto came about in the United Kingdom, rather than the tuba’s native Germany, the United States, or any other country that was making significant contributions to Western art music at the time. The Vaughan Williams tuba concerto remains a staple in the repertoire to this day, and its influence in the realm of tuba literature is far-reaching. The Vaughan Williams Concerto influenced several subsequent composers of tuba concertos and significant works for the tuba, whether directly through quotation or on a surface level, through a superficial comparison of motivic material.

## The Gregson Concerto

The first British tuba concerto that the Vaughan Williams Concerto had a significant influence on was written in 1976 by Edward Gregson (b. 1945). Gregson is a British composer of orchestral, instrumental, and vocal works, as well as music for theatre and television. Gregson wrote his Tuba Concerto for the Besses o’ th’ Barn Brass Band; it is dedicated to John Fletcher, who gave the inaugural performance on April 24, 1976, in Middleton Civic Hall near Manchester, England. John Fletcher was a renowned British tubist and teacher who was principal tuba with the BBC Symphony Orchestra from 1964-1966 and with the London Symphony from 1966 until his untimely death in 1987. Fletcher himself gave a notable

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<sup>13</sup> Bevan, (2008) 63.

performance of the Vaughan Williams Concerto in 1972 with the London Symphony and André Previn conducting. Fletcher played the piece on an E-flat rather than the F tuba for which the Vaughan Williams was originally written. This was another direct connection to the British style brass bands, which typically consist of two E-flat and two BB-flat basses. That the Gregson might have been strongly influenced by the Vaughan Williams Concerto is not surprising, considering that in 1976 that tuba literature was still somewhat in its infancy, and the Vaughan Williams Concerto and Tuba Sonata by Paul Hindemith were still the only works written by major composers for the tuba. When considering the possible English brass band influence on the Vaughan Williams Concerto, it would seem only a matter of time before a tuba concerto with brass band would eventually be written. Indeed, the Gregson Concerto is not the only concerto written for tuba and brass band, as the Martin Ellerby Tuba Concerto (1988) and the Rodney Newton *Capriccio for Tuba* (2002), both by British composers, would appear in the subsequent decades. The Gregson Concerto has been transcribed for orchestral, wind band, and piano accompaniment; John Fletcher also gave the premiere of the concerto with orchestral accompaniment in 1983 with the Scottish National Orchestra and Sir Alexander Gibson conducting. Like the Vaughan Williams, the Gregson Concerto has three movements, and follows the standard fast-slow-fast protocol. Both concertos are neo-romantic in style, and do not include experimentation with unusual harmonies, only with the range and technique of the tuba. Bevan describes the Vaughan Williams and Gregson as both including “melodies that can be understood

by the listener.”<sup>14</sup> Douglas Joseph Shabe, in his dissertation entitled “A Stylistic and Comparative Analysis of Edward Gregson’s Tuba Concerto,” describes the similarity of the form and structure of the two concerti:

When comparing the Gregson concerto to the one by Vaughan Williams, the first thing that stands out is the striking similarity of form. The first movements of both concerti are sonata forms, although Vaughan Williams takes some liberties with the form. The second movements are basically arch forms. Gregson lays out the ABCBA form clearly, while Vaughan Williams treats the form with a little more freedom – but the arch form is present. Both final movements are rondos that contain a main theme, two episodes and a cadenza. Clearly, Gregson has used the overall structure of the Vaughan Williams concerto as a model for his work.<sup>15</sup>

Aside from the similarities of form, to what extent melodically and motivically did the Vaughan Williams Concerto influence the Gregson Concerto? What is apparent right away is the direct quotation from the first movement of the Vaughan Williams Concerto contained within the first movement of the Gregson. It appears not at the beginning of the movement as in the Vaughan Williams, but during the development section.

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<sup>14</sup> Clifford Bevan, *The Tuba Family* (Hampshire: Faber and Faber Unlimited, 1978).

<sup>15</sup> Douglas Joseph Shabe, “A Stylistic and Comparative Analysis of Edward Gregson’s Tuba Concerto,” Long Beach: California State University (1999) 31.

Example 2a: Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Concerto for Bass Tuba*, Movement 1, mm. 1-5

Allegro moderato (♩ = 96)

cantabile

*p*

*f*

*p*

The score is for three staves in bass clef, 2/4 time, key of B-flat major. The tempo is Allegro moderato (♩ = 96). The first staff has a 'cantabile' marking and a dynamic of *p*. The second and third staves have a dynamic of *f* at the beginning, which then changes to *p* for the final measure.

Example 2b: Edward Gregson, *Tuba Concerto*, Movement 1, mm. 82-83<sup>16</sup>

The score is for three staves. The top staff is in bass clef, the middle in treble clef, and the bottom in bass clef. The key signature has two flats. The music features a variety of rhythmic patterns and dynamics, including a *f* dynamic in the top staff and a *f* dynamic in the middle staff.

<sup>16</sup> Edward Gregson, *Tuba Concerto* (London: Novella Publishing Limited, 1976).



The quote is brief, but immediately recognizable, as it is almost identical in both the melody and the accompaniment, only transposed up a step in the melody. This direct reference seems to be tongue-in-cheek, and a humorous homage to Vaughan Williams about halfway through the movement before introducing new material. The first movement is marked “Allegro deciso” and quarter note equals 104, only slightly faster than the quarter note equals 96 found in the first movement of the Vaughan Williams, and certainly within the range of the tempi at which tubists tend to play the first movement of the Vaughan Williams. The introductory motive of the first movement of the Gregson is also somewhat similar to that of the beginning of Vaughan Williams. The rhythmic structure of these motives is quite similar, both featuring two sixteenth notes moving to a long note that lasts three beats. The only difference between them rhythmically is that the Gregson begins with an eighth note followed by two sixteenths, whereas the Vaughan Williams opens with four sixteenths. Harmonically, both motives strongly emphasize a perfect fourth leap from C to F, although Gregson approaches this leap directly, unlike Vaughan Williams, who added E-flat as a passing tone between them. The Gregson motive is also down one octave from the Vaughan Williams. Another parallel between the two concertos can be drawn in the alternative cadenzas in the first movement of the Vaughan Williams and in the final movement of the Gregson, both of which are optional. In the cadenza section of the Vaughan Williams first movement, after a sequence going from C<sup>2</sup> to F<sup>4</sup>, then F<sup>1</sup> to F<sup>4</sup>, the player may take another leap of a minor third to A-flat<sup>4</sup>. The Gregson cadenza consists primarily of triplets and quarter notes, and does not appear to bear any resemblance to the Vaughan

Williams, aside from perhaps the pacing. The alternative cadenza in the Gregson Concerto, however, features three minor third leaps from D<sup>4</sup> to F<sup>4</sup>, and though it is transposed down a minor third, a minor third leap in that register is undeniably reminiscent of Vaughan Williams. The familiar A-flat<sup>4</sup> is also present in the Gregson cadenza, followed by the same gradual descent, only down to A-flat<sup>1</sup> rather than C<sup>2</sup> in the Vaughan Williams. Thus, from a motivic standpoint, a part of this cadenza is similar to the Vaughan Williams cadenza, only transposed down a minor third.

Example 3a: Ralph Vaughan Williams, Concerto for Bass Tuba, Movement 1, cadenza



Example 3b: Edward Gregson, Tuba Concerto, Movement 3, alternative cadenza



The Gregson is, of course, quite different from the Vaughan Williams in style, character, and in the harmonies that it uses, but the similarity between them is enough that one familiar with the Vaughan Williams Concerto could readily detect its influence.

## The Steptoe Concerto

A third British tuba concerto that should be discussed in this comparison is Concerto for Tuba and Strings by Roger Steptoe (b. 1953). The concerto began as three separate pieces for tuba and piano before the composer decided to consolidate them into a concerto. Steptoe is an English composer of chamber music, song cycles, concerti, and other instrumental works. Steptoe wrote the tuba concerto in 1983 for James Gourlay, a renowned player and conductor who is currently the music director of the River City Brass Band, having previously been an active teacher and performer in several of the most prestigious universities and orchestras throughout the United Kingdom. The River City Brass Band is in fact a British-style brass band based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania that is currently the world's only full-time professional band of its kind. The Steptoe Concerto is one of four concertos recorded by Gourlay, with the Royal Ballet Sinfonia and Gavin Sutherland conducting, on his album *British Tuba Concertos*; the Vaughan Williams and Gregson concertos are two of the others, and the fourth piece is John Golland's Tuba Concerto Op. 46. The string orchestra accompaniment in the Steptoe is scored for three first violins, three second violins, two violas, two cellos, and one bass, and as with the other concertos, there is a piano transcription of the accompaniment.

This concerto represents a marked departure from the Vaughan Williams and Gregson in that in many places Steptoe eschews traditional harmonies in favor of twelve-tone techniques. The music is mostly chromatic and atonal, although there is a pervasive sense of cantabile throughout all three movements. Rather than following the standard fast-slow-fast arrangement of movements, the second movement is a lively “giocoso” marked quarter note equals 116, and moves *attacca* through a long solo tuba cadenza into a final slow movement that is marked “Molto calmo” and dotted quarter note equals 58-60. The ending of the piece in this quiet slow movement seems anticlimactic compared to the loud and punctuated endings of the Vaughan Williams and Gregson, and the lack of tonal center compounds that fact. The first movement begins with a moderately slow lyrical section that is marked “Con poco moto” and quarter note equals circa 72, which soon progresses into a slightly faster development section marked “poco più mosso,” quarter note equals circa 80 at rehearsal 3, and a lively “Allegro,” quarter note equals circa 126-132 at rehearsal 7. Following the faster development section, the music returns to a slower, lyrical section in rehearsal 11 that is similar in style to the beginning of the piece, and is marked “Poco più calmo.” Despite having no key, the concerto includes numerous accidentals throughout, and an analysis of pitch class sets from the beginning of the piece to rehearsal 2 in the first movement alone reveals that this movement is serial and uses all twelve tones of the chromatic scale in various arrangements of a prescribed order. The first row presents the twelve tones of the chromatic scale in the following order: F, G, B-flat, A, F-sharp, B, C-sharp, D-sharp, E, D, C, and G-sharp, and the piece continues on with different permutations of the

row. An image of the opening to rehearsal 2 of the solo tuba part to the Steptoe Concerto is provided in example 4 below.

Example 4: Roger Steptoe, *Concerto for Tuba and Strings*, Movement. 1, mm. 1-19<sup>17</sup>

Con poco moto ♩ = c.72

*mp molto cantabile*

*mp* *mf ma dolce* *mp*

*poco*

1 2

<sup>17</sup> Roger Steptoe, *Concerto for Tuba and Strings* (London: Stainer and Bell Limited, 1983).

The similarity and connection from the Steptoe Concerto to Vaughan Williams and Gregson from a tonal standpoint is, because of Steptoe's atonal writing, not as readily apparent as the connection between the Gregson and Vaughan Williams, but parallels can still be drawn. In the beginning of the second movement, one can detect right away the influence of Vaughan Williams with the prominent use of quartal harmonies, this time transposed up a fourth with F<sup>3</sup> to B-flat<sup>3</sup>, and F-sharp<sup>3</sup> to B<sup>3</sup>. The F-sharp to B is approached directly, whereas the F to B-flat is interrupted by a major second to G<sup>3</sup> and a minor third to B-flat<sup>3</sup>, an indirect approach using a minor third is also frequently utilized in the first movement of the Vaughan Williams. This evolves into long sequences of sixteenth note runs where the perfect fourth leaps remain prevalent throughout the movement.

Example 5: Roger Steptoe, Concerto for Tuba and Strings, Movement. 2, mm. 1-3



The tempo of this movement at quarter note equals 116 is twenty clicks faster than Vaughan Williams' quarter note equals 96, but it is not so much faster that there can be no resemblance in character. Arnold Jacobs also played the first movement of the Vaughan Williams at 116 in his recording, which puts that livelier

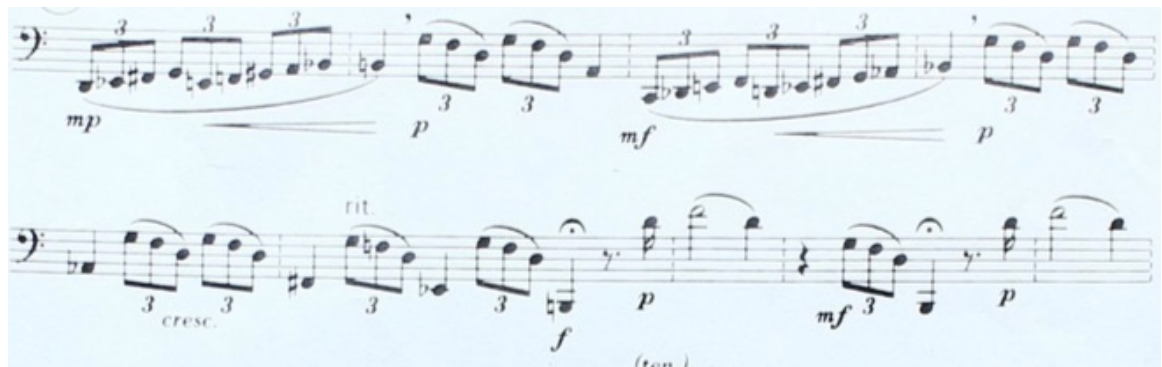
tempo in the range of acceptable tempi for Vaughan Williams, even if it is pushing the boundary of acceptability. The second movement of the Steptoe Concerto ends with a cadenza having a basic shape that is reminiscent of the cadenza in the first movement of Vaughan Williams, only a bit more expansive. Both are arch shaped, beginning in the low register with a long note followed by sixteenth note runs that peak at about three octaves above that: the Vaughan Williams spanning from F<sup>1</sup> to F<sup>4</sup> with an optional A-flat<sup>4</sup> above it, and the Steptoe from A<sup>1</sup> briefly to A<sup>3</sup>, but ending with the G-flat<sup>3</sup> an augmented second below A<sup>3</sup>. After going from low to high in sequences of sixteenths, both cadenzas return from high to low in sequences of triplets while increasing intensity with tempo and volume. The Steptoe sequence includes smaller intervals, utilizing many minor seconds, major seconds, and minor thirds, whereas Vaughan Williams's sequence makes use of wider intervals such as fourths. The alternative cadenza in the third movement of the Gregson also takes a similar approach to that of the Vaughan Williams and Steptoe in terms of pacing and moving in an arch shape from a low to high register and returning to the low register. On the other hand, while Vaughan Williams utilizes a sequence that repeats the opening motive of the piece and ascends directly in intervals of fourths and fifths, Gregson and Steptoe are not as direct in their approach, and utilize register jumps that meander around in the middle and low register before approaching the high register more abruptly. This is especially true of the Gregson cadenza, which includes a more than two-octave skip from B<sup>1</sup> held by a fermata to D<sup>4</sup> to F<sup>4</sup> a minor third higher. Such a wide leap is not found in Steptoe's cadenza, but example 6

pictured below reveals that Steptoe's overall approach is somewhat similar to Gregson's.

Example 6a: Ralph Vaughan Williams, Concerto for Bass Tuba, Movement. 1, cadenza



Example 6b: Edward Gregson, Tuba Concerto, Movement 3, alternative cadenza





Example 6c: Roger Steptoe, Concerto for Tuba and Strings, Movement 2, cadenza



Aside from the similarity in the general contour of the lines, the Steptoe cadenza is also motivically similar to the Vaughan Williams and Gregson cadenzas in its prominent use of minor thirds. The Steptoe cadenza features descending minor thirds much more prominently, as the lines start on the upper notes rather than lower, but also alternates descending and ascending minor thirds in sixteenth note triplets during the middle of the cadenza, and in eighth note triplets at the end. As the cadenza has greatly picked up pace and essentially reached its peak in its middle sections, minor third sixteenth note triplets begin alternating between E-flat<sup>4</sup> and C<sup>4</sup>, then moving up a half step to E<sup>4</sup> and C-sharp<sup>4</sup>, then down a perfect fourth to B<sup>3</sup> and G-sharp<sup>3</sup>, before the pattern is broken in the next triplet figure with an ascending A<sup>3</sup> to C<sup>4</sup>. The intervals gradually become smaller than minor thirds as the line winds its way down, becoming progressively more intense. After the cadenza

has descended down to the low register following its climax, two minor third sixteenth note figures act as a brief echo, contrasting a discreet, quiet motive in the upper register with the main theme in the low register. The first figure is a descending minor third going from F<sup>4</sup> to D<sup>4</sup>, the same two notes that appear in the Gregson cadenza, only in reverse. The second figure is transposed down a half step, E<sup>4</sup> going to C-sharp<sup>4</sup>, and the third figure down an augmented fourth from that to B-flat<sup>3</sup> and G<sup>3</sup>. The cadenza eventually ends with a calm, somewhat lyrical minor third motive that is reminiscent of an echo of the previous minor third patterns, and this motive segues *attacca* into the serene third movement.

Example 7a: Roger Steptoe, *Concerto for Tuba and Strings, Movement 2, cadenza*



Example 7b: Roger Steptoe, *Concerto for Tuba and Strings, Movement 2, cadenza*



The Steptoe Concerto requires a great deal of technical facility, and is arguably more difficult than the Vaughan Williams and Gregson Concertos in terms of rhythm, fast-moving articulations, and intervallic relationships, given that there is often no tonal center. In terms of overall difficulty and in its use of serial technique, the Steptoe Concerto can therefore be seen as something of a next development in the British tuba concerto.

## The Newton Capriccio

The Vaughan Williams and Gregson Concertos have probably also influenced newer music written for the tuba, including a shorter work, Rodney Newton's 2002 piece, *Capriccio for Tuba*. Newton (b. 1945) is a British composer and conductor. Like the Steptoe Concerto, the Newton *Capriccio* was also written for James Gourlay, who was at the time Head of Wind and Percussion at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, England. Like the Gregson, the Newton *Capriccio* was originally written for solo tuba with brass band accompaniment, and was later transcribed for band, piano, and other mediums. The *Capriccio* is different from the other three in that it is not a concerto in three movements, but rather in one movement, and is a bit shorter in duration, approximately nine minutes. The

*Capriccio* includes three large-scale presentations of a virtuosic main theme interspersed with brief *cantabile* lyrical themes. The first theme is preceded by a brief introduction from the band followed by cadenza-like tuba solo that is marked *Senza misura*, meaning that it is to be played freely and out of time. Lyrical sections follow the first two occurrences of the main theme, the second occurrence of the lyrical section being only a brief return to the material presented in the first. In the final section, where the primary material returns once again, the main theme is elaborated upon until the music is brought to a rousing conclusion.

The influence of both the Vaughan Williams and Gregson Concertos can be readily detected in Newton's writing. The introduction with the band followed by the *Senza misura* tuba solo is certainly reminiscent of the introduction to the Gregson Concerto. Both Gregson's and Newton's instrumental introductions set the tone of the pieces well. The Gregson introduction is slightly longer than the Newton, and the quasi-cadenza tuba solo is briefly interrupted in the accompaniment by two sixteenth notes on the upbeat followed by an eighth on the downbeat, presumably to highlight its fanfare-like character. The Newton *Senza misura* section is slightly shorter than that of the Gregson, and is not interrupted by accompaniment, but the two quasi-cadenzas are similar in their fanfare-like character, shape, and likely in pacing as well, depending on the performer's interpretation.

Example 8a: Rodney Newton, *Capriccio for Tuba*, mm. 6<sup>18</sup>



Example 8b: Edward Gregson, *Tuba Concerto*, Movement 1, mm. 18



The motivic material in the main theme of the Newton *Capriccio* also bears a striking similarity to that of the Vaughan Williams. The introduction of the Newton includes a motive that is found interspersed throughout the main theme where groups of four sixteenth notes travel via a major second B-flat<sup>2</sup> to C<sup>3</sup> and a minor third C<sup>3</sup> to E-flat<sup>3</sup> to a perfect fourth C<sup>3</sup> to F<sup>3</sup>. Example 9 reveals that the notes, intervals, and rhythm introducing the main theme at rehearsal A in the Newton are remarkably similar to Vaughan Williams's opening figure in the first movement of his Concerto (see Example 2a), and this motive returns several times throughout the piece, whenever the main theme is presented. Certainly, the two figures are not exactly the same. Newton's motive begins with B-flat<sup>2</sup> on the downbeat of rehearsal

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<sup>18</sup> Rodney Newton, *Capriccio for Tuba* (Bicester: Rosehill Music Publishing Company Limited, 2002).

A and moves a perfect fifth to F<sup>3</sup> on beat two, while Vaughan Williams moves only a fourth from C on the downbeat of beat two in measure 4. This is the result of the intervallic relationships in the Newton figure being the opposite of Vaughan Williams: an ascending major second followed by a descending minor third as opposed to Vaughan Williams's ascending minor third followed by a descending major second. Not only are the intervallic relationships in the Newton figure opposite to that of Vaughan Williams, the articulation pattern is opposite as well: a slur-two, tongue-two pattern rather than tongue-two, slur-two. The tempo of quarter note equals 108 at rehearsal A is also faster than Vaughan Williams's quarter note equals 96, but only slightly faster, and certainly within the range of acceptable tempi at which the Vaughan Williams could be performed. The minute differences in articulation and intervallic relationships between the two figures are enough to distinguish them and make an interesting contrast, yet a listener familiar with the Vaughan Williams Concerto would almost certainly be able to detect his influence on Newton's writing. The Newton figure is pictured in example 9 below.

Example 9: Rodney Newton, *Capriccio for Tuba*, mm. 7-8



It seems unlikely that Newton, in writing his *Capriccio*, would be paying direct homage either to Vaughan Williams or Gregson, but their influence is certainly felt, as this introductory section and main theme seems to be somewhat of an amalgamation of some of the best-known musical characteristics of the Vaughan Williams and Gregson. The resemblance of a piece that was written several decades later to the Vaughan Williams and Gregson Concertos is further evidence that the influence of these seminal works is still felt, even in the twenty-first century.

## Conclusion

The tradition and evolution of British tuba literature had its roots in the orchestral world, and in the British-style brass band tradition. Ralph Vaughan Williams was likely inspired by the British brass band tradition, and perhaps even the orchestral music of his former teacher, Maurice Ravel, to write the world's first tuba concerto, and from this a great new tradition was forged. The Vaughan Williams Concerto clearly had some influence on Edward Gregson's decision to

write a tuba concerto for John Fletcher and brass band, and both pieces influenced more modern works by British composers such as Roger Steptoe and Rodney Newton. While there are many concertos and solo works for the tuba today written by composers from a number of countries, the British tradition typified by the Vaughan Williams and Gregson Concertos represent a strong national identity that was seminal in the world of tuba solo repertoire and remains an integral part of the literature to this day.



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